Opening a Non-exit State:
The Passport Policy of Communist Poland, 1949–1980
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This article presents the passport policy of communist Poland, from the late 1940s to 1980. In the late 1940s, the policy and the institutions that implemented it were given objectives and forms similar to those in the USSR. This Soviet-type policy was in principle a non-exit policy; issuing a passport was an exception that required a solid justification. However, after 1953, following the Soviet Thaw, Polish leaders gradually relaxed the restrictions on exit, which allowed for massive outflows, mainly to Germany and Israel, and for development of temporary mobility, mainly within the Soviet bloc. In the late 1950s, the Polish party restricted emigration but it did not return to the Stalin-era non-exit model. The party developed a new, complex passport policy, which favorably viewed mobility within the bloc and was selective toward travel to the West. This allowed international mobility to expand to a mass scale and become part of the lived experience of millions of Poles. The police apparatus that implemented the policy also expanded and evolved into a complex bureaucratic machinery, but to its end it combined the features of a Weberian bureaucracy with the characteristics of a revolutionary, extralegal “secular arm of the party.”

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An obsessive control of and systematic restrictions on international mobility were among the distinguishing features of the communist regimes of Central and Eastern Europe. Heavily protected borders and their suspicious gatekeepers were an essential part of the communist landscape. They restrained the horizons of many Central and Eastern Europeans both literally and mentally. Without taking into account the restrictions, we cannot understand many of the decisions that people living under the regimes were making.

All modern states make efforts to control mobility across their borders, long-term and labor migrations in particular. The state monopolization of the legitimate “means of movement,” as John Torpey named the emergence of the passport system in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, has been a universal phenomenon. Yet the communist states took this process to extremes. The degree of control on travel abroad and restrictions exerted and intended in this field by the communist governments have been historically unique. No other regime developed mobility control policies and institutions of comparable reach, size, and complexity.
On the other hand, this paper will demonstrate that, after the mid-1950s, Polish communists abandoned the crude non-exit policy for a more complex policy of selectively opening the borders. This was limited and far from the freedom of movement we now enjoy, but it gradually allowed large streams of international mobility to develop. Thousands, then hundreds of thousands, and eventually millions of Poles went abroad for shorter or longer trips—more than at any moment in Poland’s previous history. This offered new experiences in foreign lands, opportunities for work and higher earnings, as well as options for leaving Poland permanently. If the above assumption on the far-reaching psychological consequences of closed borders is right, then their opening, even if partial and selective, should have been consequential too, influencing the ways of thinking of those who eventually went abroad as well as those who did not.

To those who explore the past in search of natural experiments, the history of communist passport policy offers a relatively well-documented experiment in government control over a complex social phenomenon; an experiment on a scale and with costs no research can imitate, as it involved whole nations through several decades. It tells us something about the nature of the communist regime and its evolution, as well as the capacities and limits of the state in general (or large social engineering projects) or, on the other hand, about the social capacities for adaptation, resistance, evasion, and subversive innovation in response to restrictive policy. For the Polish communist experiment in “seeing like a state,” the phenomenon of international mobility seems no less interesting than the grand projects so aptly analyzed by James Scott.

This article presents the Polish communists’ passport policy, that is, the rules and procedures of issuing or not issuing the documents that were required to exit the country legally. For those readers who find it obvious to have and keep passports at home, we should stress that in communist Poland, a passport was not just an identity document for travel abroad but also an exit permit. Up to 1989, each and every trip outside the Soviet bloc, and during most of the period each and every trip abroad, required applying for a passport document of one kind or another. Having screened the application and the applicant, the passport service—a department within the Security Service—gave or refused the document. Upon return, one had to bring it back without delay, and apply again when planning the next trip abroad. Throughout most of the period, only a small number of diplomats and other trusted public officials enjoyed the privilege of keeping their passports at home. Passport policy was exit policy.

This is a historical study of what the policy consisted of, what its instruments were, and how it changed over time. It presents selected findings from a major research project on migrations from Poland, 1949–1989. The project exploited the opportunities offered by the opening of the communist archives, in particular, the documents of the Polish communist party (Polska Zjednoczona Partia Robotnicza [PZPR]) and the state Security apparatus. This is a sea of paper. The documents left by the Security’s passport department alone, consisting mainly of files with passport
applications, submitted by citizens through four decades, fill some sixty kilometers of shelving at the Institute of National Remembrance. Yet some policy documents are missing or leave essential questions open. Such gaps seem to result not just from the poor quality of the early communist apparatus’ bureaucratic culture, but also from the quasi-revolutionary nature of the regime in those years. For policies after 1956, the sources are richer, more systematic, and detailed.

For reasons of space, this article is limited in scope; its time frame ends in 1980, covering two distinct phases: the years of high Stalinism from the late 1940s to the mid-1950s, and those of really existing socialism after 1956. In the first period, passport policy and the relevant institutions took shape, radically altering the conditions for international mobility from Poland. By the mid-1950s they destabilized and partially disintegrated, which opened the door for a large wave of outmigration. After 1958, they restabilized and then gradually took their mature forms, which largely lasted up to 1980. In the 1970s, new policies of modernization, consumerism, and détente gave the communist understanding of the “right to passport” its most liberal shape, which allowed for the greatest cross-border flows that Poland saw before 1989. The article pays particular attention to the two major stages in the policy’s history: its emergence in the late 1940s and its transition from the most restrictive policy in the early 1950s to that of the post-Stalin era.

**Sovietization: Making Poland a Closed State**

Although the communists ruled Poland since the Soviet army forced the Germans out in 1944–1945, the history of the communist regime in Poland only begins a few years later. The communist party effectively destroyed all organized opposition, established its political monopoly, and accelerated the process of Sovietization only in 1948–1949. This coincided with the end of the great postwar population transfers. In 1945–1947 millions of people crossed Polish borders, coming back from wartime deportation and exile, or being deported to or from Poland. Most of Poland’s borders had only just been delineated and were loosely controlled. By the early 1950s, the borders had become solid and fortified, and the number of Poles crossing them was negligible. For example, in 1951 the total number of passports issued was 9,360, of which only 1,980 were for travel outside the Soviet bloc and almost all were for state and party officials going on business trips. In 1954, only 52 individuals gained passports for private trips to the West and some 50 emigration permits were issued. Even the number of official business trips within the Soviet bloc reached a mere few thousand. It seems that never before in the history of Poland had external mobility been so limited, especially relative to the size of the population. In a country of twenty-seven million people, the few dozen persons allowed to emigrate constituted 0.0002 percent of the total population. Before the war, this rate was at least a thousand times higher.
This dramatic, unprecedented decline in mobility resulted from the introduction of Soviet-type policies of isolation. The USSR had become a closed state during the late 1920s and 1930s. The erection of legal, institutional, and material barriers to international mobility had been a part of Stalin’s top–down revolution, which transformed the Soviet state and society in the 1930s. After the war-time turmoil and related migrations had ended, and the Cold War had begun, the Soviets renewed these policies with even greater determination. In particular, in the late 1940s they built a heavy border protection system along their new western frontiers and made their Central European satellites follow suit. While the archival evidence of the relevant Soviet directives for the satellites remains to be found, the simultaneous introduction in all the satellite states of passport and border policies that were similar to the Soviet model leaves no doubt as to where the initiative came from.

However, the imposition of a non-exit regime in Poland was likely even without Soviet orders. Polish communists imitated the Soviet regime in various spheres even without pressure being exerted: because of servility and anticipatory obedience as well as sincere belief in its superiority. Like the Soviets, and from similar reasons, they wanted to cut their subjects off from any subversive influence from the West. As Marxists, they believed in labor as the source of added value and like the predatory rulers of the early modern period, they zealously wanted to keep it for their ambitious goals. Their major objectives, the integration and population of the Western Territories, just annexed from Germany (which made up a third of new Poland), and the industrial great leap forward, which they initiated in late 1940s, required millions of people. When the Cold War escalated, westward migration meant not just loss of manpower but an advantage for the enemy. Last but not least, the unfeasibility of exit strengthened the perception that the communist rule was a fate one could not escape. Since Alberto Hirshmann’s seminal study *Exit, Voice, and Loyalty*, these have been the key terms to define responses to undesirable changes in organizations, firms, and states by their members, clients, and citizens. The communist states provide, at least in their Stalinist form, an example of radical suppression of both voice, that is, the possibility of expressing discontent, and exit, that is, the possibility of leaving. This left their citizens with little choice but loyalty, or at least its appearance. The freedom they offered was the “recognized necessity” to adapt to the regime, one way or another.

In the Polish case, we find many specific traces of direct Soviet influence, including the very name of the Foreign Passports Bureau (Biuro Paszportów Zagranicznych). “Foreign passport” is a literal translation from the Russian. In Polish, every passport is a foreign passport (i.e., a passport for travel abroad), whereas in Russian the adjective “foreign” is necessary to distinguish them from regular passports, that is, identity documents for domestic use. The Bureau, like its Soviet model, was established as a part of the political police, the Ministry of Public Security. Its first director, Col. Sobczyński, had been a Soviet partisan and an NKVD agent. He had a long party record, proletarian class origin, elementary education, and no experience with passport matters or public administration whatsoever.
The Passports Bureau (PB) and its *modus operandi* were designed not to issue passports but to refuse them. First, the whole application process discouraged citizens from applying. To apply, one had to request the application form, which was available on the Bureau premises, that is, only in one office in Warsaw, open to the public just for a few hours, two days a week. One could ask for it by mail, but in this case one had to offer a sufficient justification for such an unusual request. The application form consisted of a few dozen detailed questions about the applicant, his or her family in Poland and abroad, the reasons for the trip, sources of financing, etc. One also had to attach a CV and documents attesting that the applicant’s employer, local tax office, and military service administration (if the applicant was male and of draft age) posed no objections to the journey. Plausibly, each of those who were to so declare carefully checked the applicant’s papers. Knowing that such cases were of special interest to the Security, they certainly did not want to make the mistake of overlooking anything they should notice. Once the application was ready, one then had to submit it personally. Applicants who did not live in Warsaw traveled long hours, and waited long hours to see a clerk, who could always find a piece of information or attachment missing and consequently refuse to accept the documents.

Second, after they were eventually submitted, the documents then were scrutinized by the Passports Bureau, first its administrative staff, then a Security officer. Their aim was to find reasons to reject the application. A copy of the application went to the MBP archives and the relevant provincial Security Office, which notified the Bureau if there were any prior materials regarding the applicant. The passport officer in charge of the application did not make a decision himself but prepared a request to his superiors, explaining the reasons why he proposed accepting or rejecting it. This was the basis for the decision of the Bureau’s director, which was not final. At the third stage, the Bureau had to confer with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MSZ) about its decision. If the MSZ said yes, the PB sent the documents to the party’s Central Committee (CC) for the fourth evaluation. Apparatchiks at the CC Administrative Department reviewed the documents and submitted them to a special commission of four senior Party leaders, who made the final decision.

Obviously, under such a procedure, in a period when the party and the Security leaders repeatedly called for vigilance, the PB director had strong reasons to reflect seriously before he made a positive decision, which might appear wrong in the eyes of his superiors. His negative decisions were much safer, as they were not reviewed in the Central Committee. His staff had even stronger reasons to reject the applications. They had three levels of control above them as well as their colleagues, who watched them closely and criticized any apparent misbehavior at the Bureau’s party meetings. Accusations of “lack of vigilance,” “leniency,” or “liberalism” could easily damage a promising career.

Thus, the severity of the passport policy resulted not only from the highly restrictive criteria that applicants had to meet but also from the procedures in use. The
institutional design of the passport regime made all its personnel, from lowest level clerk to senior Security officer and CC apparatchik, into enemies of the applicant. They did not have to be zealous Marxist-Leninists to take a negative attitude toward those who wanted to leave socialist Poland. They had strong reasons to behave this way simply to avoid problems with their superiors, to preserve their jobs, get promoted, or get a quarterly bonus. Knowing this, we better understand why 96 percent of emigration applications in 1954 were rejected.20

Last but not least, the Bureau’s location within the Ministry of Public Security certainly made citizens reluctant to apply at all. The Security’s ruthless persecution of any real or imaginary opponents of the regime, including thousands of killings, tens of thousands of arrests, and routine beating and torture, had made its name fearsome among the population.21 Applying for a passport meant asking for trouble: attracting the Security’s attention could have dangerous or at least unpredictable consequences. Unsurprisingly, fewer and fewer people dared to apply, especially as the chances of success decreased to almost nothing.

A highly restrictive passport policy would not have made sense if citizens had been able to leave the country without a passport. Thus, in the late 1940s, parallel to the development of the passport procedures, the government erected an impressive border protection system that reduced chances of illegal exit to almost nil. The system included eleven hundred kilometers of barbed wire fence, fourteen thousand electronic devices to detect movement, and thirteen hundred watchtowers, standing along a belt of raked soil. More than thirty thousand soldiers of the Border Protection Troops (Wojska Ochrony Pogranicza [WOP]) stood on guard, together with a network of local Security Offices and their secret agents operating in the border zone.22 The Troops were not just similar to the Soviet NKVD Border Troops. To make them reliable and to facilitate transfer of practices, Soviet officers kept as many as 40 percent of positions of command, down to the district level. Even the head of the WOP canine school was a Soviet.23

The guards and the infrastructure mainly protected Poland’s Western and sea borders. The Eastern border was guarded by Soviet troops, barbed wire and towers, whereas the people who attempted to escape to the West via Czechoslovakia faced many risks when crossing Czech territory and trying to get through the most elaborate system protecting the Western border of the Soviet bloc. Between 1952 and 1965, at least twenty-nine Poles died at the Czechoslovak western border, where the fence was charged at six thousand volts. Many more were apprehended and sent back to Poland.24

WOP prosecuted all escape attempts and followed the defectors at any cost. Detailed reports of such pursuits and the elaborate methods and instruments of guarding leave no doubt that no single escape attempt was to go unpunished.25 Annual reports noted steady improvement in WOP’s effectiveness, measured by the proportion between the number of “border crimes” (i.e., illegal border crossings) registered and the number of violators apprehended. The numbers of registered exit attempts
declined, the ratio of apprehended violators went up to 97 percent. In the early 1950s, probably no more than a few dozen people annually managed to escape the country illegally.26 Anyone apprehended was usually sentenced to two years of labor camp; defecting soldiers or public officials faced much higher penalties, including the death sentence.27 A fundamental freedom, the “right to leave any country, including his own,” which the United Nations had just enshrined in the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights, was in practical terms abolished.

The non-exit policy of high Stalinism had two notable exceptions: a family reunification scheme for ethnic Germans, established in 1950–1951, and the “Israeli option” for Jews in 1949–1950. The governments of the newly established German Democratic Republic and Israel had insisted that emigration of Germans and Jews, respectively, be allowed, especially for members of families that had been divided by war (see Panagiotidis’s article in this issue). After much hesitation, Warsaw eventually agreed to these requests, in particular, as it desired to rid the country of the elderly, sick, or otherwise unproductive Germans in the Western Territories, which up to 1945 had been part of Germany, whereas the Israelis were ready to pay for every Jewish emigrant.28 The decision to open the gates for Jews and Germans was a kind of follow-up to the postwar population movements of “ethnic unmixing.”29 Members of both groups left Poland on an exceptional basis, in organized transports, within limited quotas or a predefined period. They had to resign their Polish citizenship (if they had had it), and were hence not counted as emigrants but as foreigners. These exceptions established precedents for larger outflows when destalinization shook the regime in the mid-1950s.

**The Thaw and Reopening of the Borders**

After Stalin’s death in 1953, Soviet leaders actively encouraged their satellites to revise various policies that they found counterproductive or excessive. With respect to Polish migration, we can see the first signs of an upcoming change in 1954. When signals of the Thaw in the USSR began to melt uncompromising attitudes toward relations with the West in Poland, Israeli and German governments raised the issue of emigration again. This time, the key role was played by the West German government, which backed its plea with economic arguments and the example of similar gestures made recently by the Soviets.30 Soviet leaders were indeed sending signals of their intention of improving East–West relations, in particular with regard to the German question, including the release of German prisoners of war. The authorities in Warsaw watched attentively and wondered about the permissible boundaries to revisions of their policy.31

One of the relevant steps, inspired by the Thaw and agreed upon with Moscow, was the January 1955 declaration of the Polish government on the end of the state of war against Germany. Under international law, this meant, among other things, that
German citizens in Poland (where there remained some seventy thousand citizens of pre-1945 Germany who had not acquired Polish citizenship) who wished to leave could not be forbidden to return to their country, except for specific reasons.\textsuperscript{32} West German diplomats skillfully exploited the opportunity to reach a deal on a limited family reunification program. Similarly, following a relaxation in Soviet policies toward the Jews and Israel after Stalin’s death, Polish communists made some positive gestures, too. In January 1955, Israeli diplomats in Warsaw greeted with joy the news that “a woman got an emigration passport”—the first one after a long period of a complete ban on such exits. In the following months, hundreds of other successful applicants followed.\textsuperscript{33}

As the Thaw continued to influence various policy spheres, official attitudes toward emigration gradually improved. Party leaders, having accepted the family unification schemes, left the decision to grant exit permits to the Passport Bureau. This shortened the procedure and changed the incentive structure of the passport officers—in favor of approving, rather than rejecting, the applications. This change was a consequence of a general decentralizing tendency of that time, and of a rapid increase in various types of travel abroad, which made the direct micromanagement of passport matters by the party simply unfeasible.

Meanwhile, West German representatives continued their pressure, using the carrot of credit offers and the stick of trade restrictions. The economic arguments were especially convincing, as Poland’s economy had plunged into a crisis resulting from the failure of the overambitious Six Year Plan. This way, in late 1955 and again in summer 1956, they negotiated a substantial increase in the monthly emigration quotas and eventually an unlimited emigration scheme for divided families, broadly defined. In addition, to avoid the impression of treating the capitalist FRG better than the socialist GDR, the Polish government allowed for similar transports to East Germany.\textsuperscript{34} Criteria for emigration to Israel were expanded even further, to the point where, in summer 1956, passport officers were told that to unite with one’s family in Israel, one did not have to have any relatives there.\textsuperscript{35} Another factor that made the emigration of minorities more acceptable, and sometimes welcome, was the simultaneous inflow to Poland of quarter of a million immigrants. These were “repatriates,” released from the USSR in 1956–1959, who needed housing, jobs, and assistance. They often were literally located in places that had been vacated by the emigrants.\textsuperscript{36}

The social phenomenon of migration is a cumulative process, a chain reaction, which may rapidly expand. When news about the new opportunities for exit spread, the numbers of relevant applications snowballed into the thousands and eventually the hundreds of thousands. Together with the similar explosion of interest in short-term travel, the flood of applications overwhelmed the Passport Bureau, causing long delays in processing. This led to another step in the decentralization of decision making in the provinces of the Western Territories where applicants for emigration permits to Germany were concentrated. Under pressure by provincial party committees and governors, who faced crowds of determined, angry, or care-needing applicants,
the Politburo allowed the establishment of provincial and county-level Commissions for Family Unification (Komisje ds. Łączenia Rodzin), which had powers to grant, or deny, emigration permits.37

The commissions comprised representatives of the provincial or county Security Service, the respective party committee, and the local administration. Local officials were usually less demanding or more accessible than those in Warsaw, and sometimes open to corruption. Because members of the Commissions had varying understandings of the eligibility criteria and policy guidelines, the hitherto highly uniform, centralized passport policy became diversified and regionalized. News that some commissions were less restrictive than others made people change residence to increase their chances of approval.38 Busy with a general political and economic crisis, mass upheaval, and intra-party strife, the party leaders seem not to have followed the developments in migration closely, especially as the quality of relevant reports and data deteriorated. They realized only in 1957 that things had gotten out of control, and hence sacked the Passports Bureau director and put new people in charge. Before they eventually restored control and gradually tightened the grip on emigration, starting in 1958, the outflow had become truly massive. By 1959, more than 340,000 people had left Poland, of which some 230,000 went to the FRG, 40,000 to the GDR, and 50,000 to Israel.39

As we can see, some 95 percent of emigrants were members of ethnic minorities—or, at least, they declared themselves to be ethnic minorities and were recognized as such. Not only did they apply in proportionally greater numbers than ethnic Poles, they also enjoyed higher approval rates. The policy that favored them as emigrants was, paradoxically, a consequence of their discrimination in other spheres. The more visible their sympathy for the FRG or Israel, or their German or Jewish identity, the more forms of discrimination and exclusion they faced in their everyday life.40 Yet the same ethnonationalist inclinations of party apparatchiks or Security officers that stood behind this discrimination, favored their emigration. Notably, all those who decided to leave as German or Jewish “repatriates” on their way to their “external homelands” (which most of them had never seen), were deprived of Polish citizenship. They crossed the border as foreigners, bearing not Polish passports but the “Identity Documents” that were issued to stateless persons.41

On its own, however, exclusivist ethnonationalism cannot explain the relaxed restrictions on the emigration of ethnic minorities. Systematic and innovative pressure from the Israeli and German governments was at least equally important. Those ethnic minorities who did not enjoy the support of an external homeland outside the Soviet bloc, such as Ukrainians who wished to join the Ukrainian diaspora in Canada, were treated like ethnic Polish applicants.42

Liberalizing changes in the policy on the emigration of ethnic Poles, by contrast, were more limited than the above. The general decrease of fear and revival of personal contacts with relatives and friends in the West contributed to a visible growth in applications for exit, while the shift from a non-exit policy to a selective exit one and
simpler passport procedures significantly increased approval rates. Yet those who could not prove their Jewish or German origin could get an emigration permit only on the basis of family unification narrowly defined. Thus, most of the post-1956 outflow to countries other than Germany or Israel followed earlier Polish migration streams: emigrants went to the established centers of the Polish diaspora, mainly in the United States, Canada, and France, or to countries where the most recent, war-time wave of exiles had settled, such as Great Britain and Australia. The proportion of female emigrants, who were often newly married to male emigrants from the previous, highly masculinized wave, was notably high. In the 1950s and early 1960s, women constituted approximately 80% of the emigrants to Great Britain, where many ex-servicemen of the Polish Armed Forces in the West had settled after World War II.43

The years 1956–1958 were also a period of rapid increase in illegal emigration. This was not a planned outcome of any policy change, of course, but it was a foreseeable consequence of a policy that the party nevertheless approved. In 1956, the government decided to dismantle most of the barbed wire fence along the border as a symbol of Stalinist excess, especially as it “made a very bad impression on the population.” Large reductions in the Security personnel and its destabilization in 1955–1956 also affected the WOP. Before new, more sophisticated methods and devices of border control were developed, a few thousand people managed to leave, mainly across the GDR to West Berlin, which before the erection of the Wall was relatively accessible.44 Later on, as illegal border crossing again became difficult, most of the illegal emigrants were those who refused to return to Poland from a legal temporary visit outside the Soviet bloc.

Changes in the policy on temporary mobility went parallel to those in emigration matters. The policy relaxation began in 1954, in relation to business trips. Business trips (or official trips, podróże służbowe) were trips by persons delegated by a government agency, state-owned company, an official (i.e., party-controlled) mass organization or the party itself, to conduct business abroad. Such trips constituted one of four legal categories of temporary mobility abroad; the other categories included individual private trips, organized collective tours, and sport trips (by team members traveling to international sport events). Each of these categories had its own set of regulations and passport policy guidelines, as well as different types of passport documents.

The growth in the numbers of business trips was clearly a consequence of the Thaw. These journeys were made possible by the unfreezing of East–West relations and the related intensification of international economic, cultural, and sport contacts. Notably, the intensification occurred not only with respect to contacts with the West and Yugoslavia, but also in relations between the Eastern bloc countries. Despite the noisy propaganda about friendship and cooperation between “brotherly countries,” the economic and cultural contacts between them, particularly horizontal interactions between the satellite states, had been surprisingly weak before.

After a slow start, growth accelerated significantly. In 1955, the number of business trips was several times higher than in the previous years. More and more
agencies and organizations, such as trade unions and professional associations, were expanding or establishing international contacts. The number of related applications for passports grew faster than the Passport Bureau capacity to process them, which resulted in delays and many official complaints to the Bureau, its ministry and party authorities. In response, the Bureau introduced some simplifications to the procedures, whereas the party finally withdrew from the direct approval of individual cases. This allowed more than twenty-eight thousand business trips to take place in 1956, and more than thirty-seven thousand in 1957. Notably, in 1957 as many as sixteen business trips were to capitalist countries. Such a great share (44 percent) of West-bound trips was something extraordinary not only for the 1950s but also in the years to come; it would not occur again until the 1970s.

The revival of private travel abroad began in 1955, thanks to a new Soviet visa policy. Up to this time, despite all the talk of “socialist brotherhood,” visiting Poland’s eastern neighbor was by no means easy, restricted to official state and party visits, some students admitted to Soviet schools, and carefully selected individual trips. Symbolic of the isolation was the fact that the 1,245-kilometer long Polish-Soviet “border of friendship” had only one border-crossing checkpoint for civilian passengers. When in 1955 the Soviets simplified and eased their requirements for visits of citizens of communist countries, Polish media praised them, as much as they praised almost anything that the Soviets did. Seemingly no one expected that thousands of Poles would immediately apply. When they did, the surprised Passport Bureau did not put obstacles in their way, and the number of Poles visiting the USSR grew twenty-seven times—from four hundred in 1954 to eleven thousand in 1955. When in 1956 the number of relevant applications reached 156,000, many of the applicants got stuck in gigantic queues in front of the Soviet consulates, which were evidently unprepared for such a flood. Nevertheless, that year Poles made some ninety-four thousand individual trips to the USSR. Following a Soviet proposal, the Polish government allowed its citizens to travel to the USSR with only their regular IDs (dowód osobisty) instead of a passport. This practice did not last long in the 1950s, but it did make a great comeback in the 1970s.

The main reason for the surprisingly massive interest in visiting the USSR was far from fascination with the achievements of the Fatherland of the Proletariat. Polish applicants were mostly former inhabitants of the lands that had been annexed to the USSR in 1944; they wanted to visit their hometowns and relatives who had been left behind in the East. Later on, an increasing number of the visitors were petty traders attracted by the opportunities that resulted from price disparities and differences in the availability (or unavailability) of consumer goods, such as refrigerators, radio sets, or cameras in Poland and the USSR. Favorable custom regulations and the relatively low cost of rail transport, which evidently had not been established with this kind of mobility in mind, contributed to making the phenomenon of transnational petty trade massive.
The Soviets’ friendly attitude toward the visitors from abroad soon waned. Already in late 1956, Moscow informed Warsaw about restrictions on private visits, which were now available only to people visiting their closest family, on the basis of invitations certified by the Soviet police. Several months later, other restrictions followed. The number of trips to the USSR dropped to twenty-two thousand in 1957 and just eighteen thousand in 1959. Meanwhile, other communist countries fortunately followed the prior Soviet policy. This allowed for an increase in mobility in other directions, especially to Czechoslovakia and the GDR, which partially compensated for the decline at the Soviet border. Since 1959, the flows of individual visitors to socialist countries grew steadily; by 1967, they exceeded four hundred thousand per year.

For the Polish and other communist governments, the most welcome form of international mobility was collective tourist excursions. Group travel not only seemed to fit well with their collectivist ideology, but was also favored by police officers, who believed that the proper leadership of the tour guide (who often was a secret collaborator with Security) and the watchful eyes of co-travelers would prevent undesirable behavior by less disciplined participants. This assumption was not necessarily accurate, as the expansion of petty trade among such groups has shown, but this did not change the favorable treatment that collective tourist travel enjoyed in People’s Poland up to its end.

Once again, a Soviet initiative was at the origins of the expansion of collective trips during the mid-1950s. The related archival evidence reveals the pattern of Polish policy changes of that time. In August 1955, the Soviet embassy councilor informed the Polish Minister of Foreign Affairs about his government’s new decision in favor of “broader bilateral tourist movement.” A few days later, the PZPR Central Committee’s Secretariat discussed the matter; the following week a delegation of Orbis—at that time the sole foreign travel agency in Poland—left for Moscow to discuss the topic with its Soviet counterpart. A few months later, the first such tourist groups departed for the USSR. Some time later, most likely also with Soviet encouragement, other communist states began to express similarly favorable attitudes to intra-bloc tourism. In Poland, a few mass organizations and new tourist agencies were allowed to organize excursions and buy foreign currencies at favorable exchange rates, for expenses abroad. Thanks to all these changes, the numbers of participants in collective trips within the bloc grew from sixteen thousand in 1956 (prior figures are unknown) to more than fifty thousand in 1959 and 208,000 in 1967. Tours organized by trade unions and youth organizations were for many Poles their first opportunity to go abroad.

The Polish government lowered barriers to temporary private movement to the West with a certain delay in comparison to mobility within the bloc. The numbers of temporary private journeys to the West began to cautiously grow in 1955, largely as a consequence of Warsaw’s intention to improve international relations with such countries as France and Italy: foreign wives of Poles made up almost half of the few
hundred persons who benefited from the relaxation of the passport policy. The following year’s figure was seventeen times higher, and in 1957 it again grew fivefold, to fifty-five thousand. This does not mean Poles were once again free to travel abroad. They had to produce an invitation from a close relative stamped by a Polish consul, together with their employer’s approval and military clearance, and had to appear unlikely to defect. The refusal rate was 24 percent—much lower, that is, than in the recent past, but many more applicants still did not get their passports that year: the Passport Bureau proved incapable of processing as many as 70 percent of the applications before the year ended. The following year, the processing capacity increased, but 30 percent of the applications were rejected.

In early 1958, after the Ministry of Finance’s repeated complaints that large-scale travel abroad was affecting Poland’s fragile balance of payments, the Politburo demanded the Ministry and the Ministry of Internal Affairs (Ministerstwo Spraw Wewnętrznych [MSW]) curb it. This was done quickly, by a substantial increase in passport fees and special currency exchange rates that made international transportation costs several times higher than before. The financial instruments proved effective: the number of applications for tourist passports declined by almost half. In the following years, a combination of financial restrictions and selective increases in refusal rates kept private mobility to the West to between 60 and 90 percent lower than the amount of travel within the bloc. It exceeded fifty thousand trips only in the late 1960s. In addition to individual private travel, group tourism outside the Soviet bloc also reemerged after 1955, but this form of mobility remained limited in scale to a few thousand visitors annually, for it was monopolized by the Orbis travel agency and was relatively expensive.

**Mobility under Really Existing Socialism**

The restabilization of the passport regime in 1958–1959 brought a temporary reduction in the amount of international mobility, but it was not a simple return to the status quo ante. It was a significant reform and reconstruction of the relevant rules and institutions. Out of the initial confusion regarding what a non-Stalinist, yet socialist, policy should entail, which contributed to the explosion of mobility in 1955–1957, there gradually emerged a new, complex set of guidelines that replaced the crude non-exit policy of the past.

The reform altered the balance between the Passport Bureau’s two main functions: its administrative tasks (i.e., issuing passports to the citizens) and the tasks the Bureau carried out as a part of the political police (i.e., screening of applicants, preventing undesirable exits, gathering information for intelligence departments, selecting and recruiting agents and informers among the applicants, etc.). In the Stalin era, the Bureau was primarily an arm of the political police. The Thaw reduced the intensity of its security operations and made it pay greater attention to its administrative
service. Already in 1954, when the Ministry of Public Security was dissolved, the Bureau was relocated to the MSW, which supervised the criminal police, firefighters, and various administrative departments, but not the secret services, which were now separate and reported to the Committee for Public Security. The Passport Bureau’s disengagement from the security service most likely contributed to its liberalizing evolution in the crucial years of 1955 and 1956. In late 1956 the Security departments were integrated into the MSW, making a separate, privileged branch of the ministry, named the Security Service (Służba Bezpieczeństwa [SB]). The SB remained hidden within the MSW, and within the criminal police at the provincial and county or town level. As a consequence, the passport service moved closer to Security again; formally, it became part of the SB in 1964.57

Starting in the late 1960s, the PB’s intelligence tasks and its security personnel expanded. In particular, passport officers conducted “operational conversations” with thousands of persons receiving passports or returning them after a visit to the West. Meetings before the trip were to educate citizens about the need for vigilance and the perverse methods of Western intelligence, and to encourage them to watch for and report on any “anti-Polish activity.” Interviews after the trips served to gather information about such activities, contacts with foreign police and administration, the behavior of Poles met or traveled with, etc. Given their large number (which in the late 1970s grew to more than hundred thousand a year), the interviews became a source of thousands of reports for the MSW intelligence departments. Even more important were the fast-growing archives of passport applications, full of the personal data of applicants and their families. The application process also offered the SB favorable conditions for recruiting of secret collaborators. The stronger an applicant’s desire to visit family or enjoy a scholarship in the West was, the greater the temptation to accept the SB request for cooperation.58

The Secretariat of the PZPR Central Committee (CC) remained the supreme passport policy maker, but after 1956 the party no longer made decisions in individual cases. Party leaders set the policy guidelines, which the CC Administrative Department forwarded to the MSW or directly to the head of the Passport Bureau. From time to time, the CC apparatchiks summoned the PB director or his deputy to discuss any matters that had arisen, or the MSW requested the CC to clarify or make minor amendments to the guidelines. To process the expanding flow of applications, the Bureau opened branches (Passport Departments) within all provincial police headquarters, and the staff greatly expanded. Starting in the mid-1960s, the passport service responded to growing international mobility and the demand for travel documents by gradually opening several hundred Sections (or desks) in medium-sized towns and by delegating decision making to the provincial departments. The Bureau became the supervising and policy planning body as well as the review body, to which applicants could appeal negative decisions from the Passport Departments. Another substitute for an administrative tribunal, which “people’s democracy” allegedly did not need, was the system of reviewing and responding to thousands of
complaints and pleas that applicants addressed to the Ministry, the government, party leaders, major newspapers, etc.\textsuperscript{59}

In contrast to the early 1950s, implementation of passport policies became more akin to a bureaucratic routine than part of a revolutionary struggle. The Bureau developed detailed written regulations that defined, clarified, or simplified the relevant rules and procedures. The 1959 Act on Passports introduced into the Polish legal code the “right to passport” and specified the conditions under which a passport would be refused. The practical application of this law, however, was sufficiently flexible to allow for far reaching changes in policies and arbitrary decision. It shows that the “socialist rule of law” (socjalistyczna praworządność) was in fact a “rule by law,” which restricted state officials but not party leaders.\textsuperscript{60} Moreover, spheres that the party considered “political” or “state matters,” such as those of the political police, remained largely extralegal. Among other things, this meant that the Security could deny a passport to anyone “within its sphere of interest,” from dissidents to people it wanted to blackmail into becoming its secret collaborators. The applicants who were denied a passport on the basis of “other important reasons of the state” (inne ważne względy państwowe), as the Act on Passports vaguely stated, could not learn what these reasons were in their case: Passport Bureau internal regulations explicitly forbade officers from disclosing them.\textsuperscript{61} The regulations imposed extralegal penalties, such as a few years’ long ban on travel abroad, on defectors’ family members—thus attributing collective responsibility for an act that legally was not a crime—or on those who “endangered the good name of Poland” (narazila na szkodę dobre imię Polski), which could mean anything from petty trading to heavy drinking abroad.\textsuperscript{62}

In the late 1950s and the 1960s, the restrictions on mobility diversified, depending on the destination, type of mobility, and the qualities of the applicant. Travel to other Soviet Bloc countries was relatively easy and some of its forms (such as business trips to maintain or expand “socialist cooperation” between enterprises, institutions, and social organizations, or group excursions organized by youth organizations and trade unions) were encouraged and subsidized by the government. Individual travel was more expensive and applying for a passport more burdensome, but the relevant refusal rates were relatively low: in the 1960s they declined to a mere few percent. Applicants who sought passports for a trip to the West had much lower chance of success: the refusal rates varied between several and 90 percent, depending on the destination and the year.

The clearest evidence of the distinction between mobility within and outside the bloc was the introduction of different types of passports. Like other communist states, Poland introduced a special type of passport (wkładka paszportowa) that was valid for travel within the bloc only. It was available through a simpler and shorter procedure than regular passports and for a substantially lesser fee. Similarly, to save both tourists’ and passport officers’ time, the government introduced collective passports (paszporty zbiorowe) that were issued to group tour organizers. Collective
excursions organized by a mass organization were the easiest and cheapest way to go abroad, whereas individual trips to a country like West Germany or the United States were the most difficult and expensive.

The official attitude toward emigration to socialist countries was also relatively liberal, especially as only two to four thousand applied annually. Most of these emigrants moved to the GDR, especially when chances for emigration to the FRG were severely reduced. When the East German government begun a more active policy of attracting immigrants (and their much needed labor) from Poland, Polish authorities reacted promptly and scaled the outflow back down (see Panagiotidis’s article in this issue).63

The policy toward emigration outside the bloc was much more restrictive. “The People’s Republic of Poland,” a Security document made clear, “is not interested in the emigration of Polish citizens [to capitalist states] for political as well as economic reasons. Nevertheless, there is a social need to consider such applications and to give exit permits in certain cases.”64 The cases consisted mainly of members of divided families, including Polish citizens who had married a foreigner. The other category of applicants with better chances of approval were those who were elderly, disabled, or those otherwise a burden for the state. By an MSW estimate from the mid-1960s, almost half of the emigrants were people dependent on family or state welfare.65 The most likely to get the permit were those who could claim both the humanitarian argument of family unification and the economic argument of being useless for the socialist economy. On the other hand, special restrictions applied to the young, educated, or skilled. The qualities that made a man a desirable citizen of People’s Poland were precisely those that made him an unlikely (legal) emigrant. The gender in the previous sentence is not accidental: female applicants had greater chances of having their exit applications approved than men.

Most of the passport refusals resulted from group restrictions that applied to whole categories of applicants and applications. The largest such restriction, responsible for the great majority of refusals, applied to native inhabitants of the Western Territories, mainly Silesians, who wanted to emigrate to the FRG. Their chance of obtaining an exit permit, if measured by their applications’ approval rate, rarely exceeded 30 percent, and in the late 1960s, when the party leaders made them hostages to diplomatic negotiations with Bonn, it fell below 5 percent. Applicants for exit permits to other states of the West, including Israel, had much better chances. Their approval rates oscillated between 60 and 90 percent, influenced by ups and downs in bilateral relations with a given state and the general trend in the PZPR’s policies on contacts with the West and policing the population.66

A restrictive emigration policy, like that governing the outflow to the FRG, had consequences for the policy on short-term mobility. To prevent defection, similar restrictions also had to apply to potential emigrants’ temporary travel outside the bloc. Thus, the MSW rejected applications for regular tourist passports from individuals whom for various reasons it classified as prone not to return: from men of
draft age to relatives of prior defectors. Similarly, it was unlikely for anyone to obtain a passport for a temporary visit in the West together with one’s spouse and children: they often were kept in Poland as a kind of hostage.

Refusal rates could drop suddenly when the party leaders decided. With regard to emigration to West Germany, such temporary liberalizations came in the 1970s, following two major political and economic agreements between the People’s Republic of Poland (Polska Rzeczpospolita Ludowa [PRL]) and the FRG in 1970 and 1975. International relations were similarly behind the liberalization of policy on emigration to the USA, which applicants enjoyed in the early 1970s. In 1967–1969, Polish Jews were not just allowed, but actively encouraged, to leave, following the Six Day war and the “anti-Zionist” campaign in spring 1968.

The 1970s were the best decade for travel abroad in all of the PRL’s history. Just a few months after Edward Gierek replaced Władysław Gomułka as PZPR First Secretary, the Politburo approved an ambitious program of expanding international tourism. A few months later, the new leaders signed a bilateral agreement with the GDR, which introduced visa-free and passport-free movement between the two countries. A regular identity document (dowód osobisty), stamped at a county police station, was sufficient to cross the border and spend up to three months in the GDR. Mutual currency exchange regulations were similarly liberalized. Already in 1972 the number of Poles’ visits to East Germany skyrocketed to 9.5 million. In the following years, despite currency exchange restrictions and stricter customs controls, which were to protect East Germans from the consumer goods–hungry Poles, the latter crossed the Oder more than six million times every year. Starting in 1977, similar provisions were extended to other communist states of Central and Eastern Europe. Several million Poles applied for the pink stamp, which allowed for “crossing the border and staying in Bulgaria, Czechoslovakia, the German Democratic Republic, Romania, Hungary and the USSR.” Almost everyone who applied for the stamp was approved (the refusal rate was below 0.5 percent). In the following years, Poles were making between nine and eleven million trips within the bloc annually. The pleasures of free travel within the socialist world ended abruptly in fall 1980. Soon after the Solidarity trade union emerged, Poland’s neighbors suspended favorable provisions to prevent the spread of the disease of free trade unions, and the plundering of their shops.

The skyrocketing of movement within the bloc in early 1970s facilitated a more limited liberalization of the passport policy on temporary mobility outside the bloc. The latter had already tripled in the first half of the decade, to exceed half a million trips a year after 1976. However, multimillion mobility to other socialist states made this appear relatively small, hence acceptable to the regime watchdogs. Massive travel within the bloc was an important context for the liberalization of travel to the West, but the key reason seems to have been the improving East–West relations of the détente era. In particular, the Helsinki accords paid particular attention to the liberalization of migration, travel, and personal contacts across borders.
Coincidentally, from 1976 onwards, the PRL sunk into the most serious economic and social crisis of its history. The troubles made the PZPR leaders more sensitive to Western pressure concerning human rights, as well as more interested in Poles’ labor migration and their remittances in hard currencies.

The simplest index of the passport policy liberalization was the declining refusal rate of applications for regular (non-emigration) passports. After 1975, it went down to just 10 percent. The numbers of all three formal types of short-term travel abroad—individual private trips, business trips, and organized collective tours—grew steadily. The total figure of Poles’ trips outside the bloc in 1980 reached seven hundred thousand, that is, a figure almost 150 times higher than it had been in 1955. The Poland where the Solidarity movement was born in summer 1980 was clearly a state different from the Poland of Bierut or Gomułka.

**Conclusion**

The passport policy was the main factor that shaped the scale, directions, and structure of international mobility flows from communist Poland. This does not mean, however, that the government shaped the flows as it wished. At every stage of the policy’s history, its unintended consequences were numerous and important.

In its origins, the policy was an imitation of the Soviet model, as most of the “building of socialism” in Central Europe was at that time. Yet, when local conditions differed from those of the model, and knowledge of the model was imperfect, the imitation had to be creative (thus, even under high Stalinism, the passport policies of Poland differed from those of the USSR or Czechoslovakia). Moreover, the isolationist policy of the PRL, and other small or medium-sized countries of Central Europe, had different consequences than it had in the transcontinental Soviet Union.

The non-exit policy of Polish high Stalinism proved effective but costly. It etatized and reduced mobility abroad to unprecedentedly low levels; it largely prevented escape; it made the outside world appear distant and inaccessible to ordinary Poles. The costs were not just the direct costs of building and maintaining a heavy border infrastructure and large WOP and Security personnel. They also included the “very bad impression” these policies made on the populace, which did not help the legitimacy of communist rule, and the depopulation or stagnation of border areas, which were affected by particularly intrusive security measures. The restrictions on mobility also hindered economic cooperation between communist countries, as well as the social and cultural integration of the Soviet bloc. The relaxation of the policy after Stalin’s death shows that communist leaders themselves found the costs excessive.

The de-Stalinization of Polish passport policy had begun in a Stalinist way: PZPR leaders eagerly followed new Soviet advice and imitated the Soviet example. However, the package of post-Stalin, Soviet-led reforms made local factors increasingly
important. The changes of the mid-1950s expanded the relative autonomy of the PRL leaders (from Moscow) and ordinary Poles (from their rulers). They opened new room for the pursuit of various goals by local and foreign actors, from those willing to migrate, to local administrators, to Western governments. The PRL’s policies had begun to take on more particular features and differ from the respective policies of other communist states.

In the following decades, PZPR leaders periodically tightened their grip on mobility, especially with respect to emigration to the West, but, with the notable exception of a few early months of Martial Law in 1981–1982, they did not return to the Stalin-era non-exit model. They developed a new, complex passport policy, which viewed mobility within the bloc favorably and was selective toward travel to the West. This allowed international mobility to expand to a mass scale and become part of the lived experience of millions of Poles, especially among educated urbanites, members of communities with stronger transnational networks, and the inhabitants of border regions. The police apparatus that implemented the policy also expanded and evolved into complex bureaucratic machinery, but to the PRL’s end it combined the features of a Weberian bureaucracy with the characteristics of a revolutionary, extralegal “secular arm of the party.”

The non-exit policy of the early 1950s was oppressive and cruel, but it was simple and consistent. The passport policy of really existing socialism was increasingly complex and inconsistent. Its inconsistencies generated tensions within the socioeconomic and political system of the PRL. The constant pressure for greater emigration to West Germany was a major one. Other tensions resulted from temporary migrations: from the growing exposure to Western ideas and cultural patterns, including consumer desires, or from the expansion of transnational black and grey markets. Many subversive effects of short-term mobility would become clear in the 1980s.73

This leads to the last point we need to stress. The relaxing of relevant restrictions in the wake of destalinization was a necessary but not a sufficient condition for the explosion in international mobility that took place in 1955–1957. Similarly, the selective passport policy established under really existing socialism and the facilities to travel introduced in the 1970s contributed to the expansion and diversification of the mobility flows, but it but did not produce them. Without people willing to go abroad, even the most liberal policy cannot produce a growth in mobility. The story of the Poles’ interest in and demand for travel abroad unfolded simultaneously alongside the history of passport policy. This interest grew steadily, expanding to include especially those destinations and reasons that party leaders did not welcome. In particular, the numbers of those who wanted to emigrate to the West were always greater than the amount of emigration that policy makers were ready to accept. The migration potential, and the social processes that produced it, lies outside the scope of this paper, but we cannot understand the evolution of Polish passport policy without keeping these factors in mind.74
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Notes


4. The citizens were not owners but bearers of the passports, which, as their second page made clear, were “the property of the Polish People’s Republic.” This, however, is not unique to communist states.


6. The Institute of National Remembrance (Instytut Pamięci Narodowej [IPN]) holds the archival collections of the communist apparatus of repression, including the political police and civilian and military intelligence.

7. For example, even the most relevant documents of tightening the grip on the mobility in late 1940s, the protocols of the PZPR Secretariat, which approved the restrictions in 1949, barely mention reasons for the decisions, as if they were too obvious to note them. See protocols of the Secretariat of the party’s Central Committee of 12 March 1949 and 28 June 1949 in Aleksander Kochański, “Sprawy zagraniczne w protokołach Biura Politycznego i Sekretariatu KC z roku 1949,” Polski Przegląd Dyplomatyczny 1, no. 3 (2001): 248, 259.


17. PB report, 29 November 1955, CAMSW, MSW I 5, pp. 288, 296, 298, 300; application forms in AIPN, BU 1532/1311.


19. Party leader Bolesław Bierut set the tone in his speech “The Party Tasks in the Revolutionary Struggle for Vigilance” at the PZPR CC session in November 1949. Repeated calls for vigilance are recorded in the protocols of the PZPR cell at the PB, AIPN, 1572/3913, 1572/3914.

20. Informacja o wyjazdach służbowych i prywatnych za granice w 1955 r., CAMSW, MSW I 192.


25. Opis działania w związku z likwidacją bezkarnego przekroczenia, 12 October 1953, Border Guard Archive (Archiwum Straży Granicznej [ASG]), Dow. WOP 1285/181, p. 199; Opis działania grupy operacyjnej w związku z przerwaniem, 13 June 1953, ibid., p. 219.


28. For details see Stola, *Kraj*, chaps. 2 and 3.


32. Memorandum on legal and financial consequences of the end of state of war with Germany, 13 July 1955, C a MSW, MSW 1186/961, 30–34.


39. See the statistical annex to Stola, Kraj, 484 (unless otherwise defined, the statistical data on the mobility given in this article come from the annex). A few thousand emigrants to Israel were allowed to leave with a two-year delay, because of classified information they allegedly had had access to.


41. Formally, the PRL did not deprive of its citizenship but allowed for its change, yet German and Jewish emigrants had to apply for permission to change citizenship if they wished to leave. The Council of State’s resolutions of 16 May 1956 and 23 January 1958 made the change of citizenship for emigrants to Germany and Israel automatic, simplifying the practice that had been applied already for a few years, see Góralski, Transfer, 464; Szymon Rudnicki and Marcos Silber, eds., Stosunki polsko-izraelskie (1945–1967). Wybór dokumentów (Warsaw: NDAP, 2009), 483.

42. PB report for 1961, CAMSW, MSW 26/9, p. 22; Wyjazdy emigracyjne do St. Zjednoczonych, 24 October 1968, CAMSW, MSW II 50/278.


46. Sprawozdanie z wyjazdów służbowych i prywatnych w 1956 r., CAMSW, MSW 26/1, pp. 22–23; Notatka w sprawie czasowych wyjazdów za granicę, [1958], ibidem, p. 54–56; Stola, Kraj, 486.

47. Informacja o wyjazdach, 19 January 1956, CAMSW, MSW 26/1, p. 2.


50. Czechoslovakia agreed also to a convention on tourist traffic in the Tatra mountains and, in 1959, to the renewal and extension of the prewar convention on small border traffic, which applied to the inhabitants within a several kilometers wide zone on both sides of the frontier (the Convention on Small Border Traffic of 4 July 1959, Dziennik Ustaw 60.27.153; Rychlik, Cestovani, 54; Informacja o małym ruchu granicznym, 27 July 1957, CAMSW, MSW 49/1, pp. 14–15).


52. Memo of the conversation between minister Naszkowski and councilor Mielnik, 20 August 1955, AMSZ, 7.71-9, p. 38; Protocol of the meeting of the Secretariat of the PZPR Central Committee (hereinafter SKC), 25 August 1955, AAN, KC 1662, p. 235; Protocol of the talks between Orbis and Intourist, 27 August 8–1 September 1955, AMSZ, 7.71-9, pp. 23–24; Notatka dla minister Wiernej w sprawie umowy turystycznej, ibid., p. 64.


54. Informacje o wyjazdach służbowych i prywatnych za granicę w 1955 r., CAMSW, MSW, 26/1, p. 3. By Polish prewar law, still in force at that time, foreign wives of Polish citizens acquired Polish citizenship automatically; thus, they had to apply for a Polish passport to leave the country; see Notatka dotycząca obywatelstwa, 27 April 1951, AAN, KC 237/V-310, p. 17.

55. Sprawozdanie z wyjazdów służbowych, prywatnych i turystycznych [1957], 14 January 1958, CAMSW, MSW 26/1, p. 120.

56. Informacja szczegółowa z wyjazdów służbowych, prywatnych, turystycznych i sportowych za granicę w 1958 r., CAMSW, MSW 26/2, pp. 130–31.


58. For details, see Stola, Kraj, 169–76.

59. See the PB annual reports in CAMSW, MSW 26/9 – 26/19, MSW II 4499, MSW II 8394; Lewandowska, “Historia Biura,” p. 30; Analiza kadrowa organów paszportowych [1978], AIPN, MSW II 5312. The applicants could formally appeal to the minister, yet in practice the decision was with the PB director.
60. The Act on Passports (Ustawa o paszportach) of 29 June 1959, Dziennik Ustaw 59.36.224 (a few amendments were made in the following decades); Protokół analizy wniosków, 16 March 1961, AIPN, 0326/243, p. 34.

61. Main categories of persons to be refused passports were listed in the top secret instruction “Wytyczne w sprawie opinowania przez Służbę Bezpieczeństwa MSW podań osób ubiegających się o wyjazd za granicę” of 1959, see Col. Zabawski’s explanation of the instruction, 5 July 1960, AIPN, 0326/227, pp. 36–38, as well as in the PB report for 1962, CAMSW, MSW 26/11, pp. 23, 99. Their secrecy was guarded, among others, by the MSW ordinance No. 00212/59, AIPN, MSW II 5384, pp. 5–8.

62. See PB reports for 1959 (CAMSW, MSW 26/2b, p. 20, 22) and 1968 (CAMSW, MSW II 4499, p. 18).

63. Notatka w sprawie wyjazdów na pobyt stały do NRD i NRF, April 1964, AAN, KC WA 1003/14, p.176.

64. Zestawienie statystyczne dotyczące emigracji do krajów kapitalistycznych (bez Izraela i NRF), September 1968, CAMSW, MSW II 4522, p. 3.


66. Refusal rates calculated on the basis of the PB annual reports, CAMSW, MSW 26/2, 26/4, 26/5, 26/11, 26/13; Notatka w sprawie wyjazdów na pobyt stały do NRD i NRF, April 1964, AAN, KC WA 1003/14, p. 176.

67. In 1970, the migration matters were not formally part of the treaty signed. The Polish government issued a unilateral declaration, which promised to allow for the emigration of persons of German identity and divided families (see Informacja rządu PRL, 7 December 1970, in Góralski, Transfer, 483–85). In 1975, a document named “Zapis protokolarny” was made part of the set of bilateral political and economic agreements signed in October, see Sławomir Dąbski and Witold M. Góralski, Problem reparacji, odszkodowań i świadczeń w stosunkach polsko-niemieckich 1944–2004. T. 2: Dokumenty, vol. 2 (Warsaw: PISM, 2004), 475–76.


70. PB reports for 1977 and 1981, AIPN, MSW II 7133 BP and 37877.


72. A fascinating description of emotions induced by the state border in PRL provides Ryszard Kapuściński, Podróże z Herodotem (Kraków: Znak, 2004).


74. The social processes of migration are the key theme of Stola, Kraj.

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